SŪRAH 69

Al-Ḥāqqah
(The Inevitable Truth)

Prologue

This is an awesome *sūrah*, one that strikes terror in our hearts, shaking us up. From start to finish it focuses on something that is very serious, showing one awesome image after another. Some of these are frightening, some are majestic and others depict suffering, yet they are all characterized by strong movements. As a whole, the *sūrah* enhances the feeling that faith and religion are very serious; they admit no frivolity. The profundity of such questions is serious here in this life as also in the life to come. Furthermore, it is no less serious in God's own measure. Indeed, it is so serious that it permits no distraction. For, to turn away from faith and religion is to incur God's displeasure and all that is attendant with that, even though the one who turns away may happen to be God's Messenger. It is larger than God's Messenger, indeed all mankind, because it is the question of the truth absolute, laid down by the Lord of all the worlds.

This impression is heightened by the very name given in this *sūrah* to the Day of Judgement and which gives it its title, *al-Ḥāqqah*. The very sound of the word imparts a feeling of decisiveness, seriousness and a grounding stability. It sounds like a heavy object being lifted some considerable distance before being placed firmly into position. The strongly aspirated '*ḥ*' sound appears to be lifted by the elongated

'*ā*' before it is firmly placed at the doubled '*q*' and then finally stabilized with the final '*h*' sound.

We see such great seriousness in the fates of those who denied the truth of faith and the Day of Judgement. One community after another suffered such severe punishment that each were utterly destroyed: "*The people of Thamūd and 'Ād denied the Striker. The Thamūd were destroyed by an overwhelming event, while the 'Ād were destroyed by a furiously howling wind, which He caused to rage upon them for seven nights and eight decisive days. You could see their people lying dead, like uprooted trunks of hollow palm trees. Can you see any trace of them now? Pharaoh, too, and those before him, and the ruined cities – all indulged in sin, and disobeyed their Lord's messenger; and so He took them to task with an ever-tightening grip. When the waters rose high, We carried you in the floating Ark, making it all a lasting reminder for you, so that attentive ears may take heed.*" (Verses 4–12) Thus, all those who turned away from faith suffered such grave and sudden punishments, as befit their approach to this decisive and serious requirement. It is important to realize then that this question of faith and religion admits no frivolity of approach and allows no distraction.

Such seriousness is also seen in the picture the *sūrah* draws of the resurrection, the terrible end of the universe, and the even more majestic scene of the angels carrying the Throne: "*When the trumpet is sounded a single time, and the earth and mountains are lifted up and with one mighty crash are flattened, that which is certain to happen will on that day have come to pass. The sky will be rent asunder, for, it will have become frail on that day. The angels will stand on all its sides and, on that day, eight of them will bear aloft the Throne of your Lord.*" (Verses 13–17)

Such awesomeness and majesty impart added seriousness to the scene of accounting for the all-important question of faith. Both help to deepen its effect on us, as do the beats of the *sūrah* and the statements of those who are granted reward and those who are doomed to suffer: "*He who is given his record in his right hand will say, 'Come you all! Read this my record. I certainly knew that one day I would have to face my account.' He will be in a happy state of life, in a lofty garden, with its fruits within easy reach. 'Eat and drink to your hearts' content as a reward*

for what you have done in days gone by.' But he who is given his record in his left hand will say, 'Would that I had never been shown my record and knew nothing of my account! Would that death had been the end of me! Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power.'" (Verses 19–29) This long lamentation gives us a strong impression of the terrible end suffered.

God's own words, spelling out His sentence in the middle of that solemn scene on that great day, add to the seriousness of the whole affair: "*Lay hold of him and shackle him, and burn him in the fire of hell, and then fasten him in a chain seventy cubits long.*" (Verses 30–32) Each clause in this command sounds as if it carries the whole weight of the heavens and earth to strike the offender in what is a terrifying image. This sentence is then followed with an explanation of its justifying causes: "*He did not believe in God Almighty, and he never encouraged feeding the needy. So, no friend has he here today, nor any food except the filth that none other than the sinners eat.*" (Verses 33–37)

A hint of a great oath is followed in God's own statement outlining the truth of this final religion: "*I need not swear by what you can see and what you cannot see: this [Qur'ān] is the word of a noble Messenger, not the word of a poet – how little you believe! nor the word of a soothsayer – how little you reflect! This [Qur'ān] is a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds.*" (Verses 38–43)

Further seriousness is provided by the *sūrah*'s last beat as it issues a decisive warning of a very severe punishment to be meted out to anyone who tries to introduce any alteration into this faith. This applies even to Muḥammad, God's Messenger: "*Had he attributed some fabrications to Us, We would indeed have seized him by the right hand and cut off his life-vein, and none of you could have saved him.*" (Verses 44–47)

The *sūrah* concludes with another decisive statement making the question of the final divine message as it is embodied in the Qur'ān absolutely clear: "*This [Qur'ān] is indeed a reminder to the God-fearing. We well know that among you are some who deny its truth. Yet it will be a cause of bitter regret for the unbelievers. It is indeed truth absolute. Extol, then, the glory of the name of your Lord, the Supreme.*" (Verses 48–52) It is a finale that leaves no room for anything further to be added.

The Style

The *sūrah* has a central theme, which it aims to make absolutely clear. The style and beat it employs and the images and scenes it draws work in unison to drive this home to us in a highly inspiring way. Thus, the *sūrah* gives us a great host of images indeed it surrounds us with them from all sides. We cannot fail to see them brought alive as if they are taking place in front of our very eyes. Here, we see the fates of the Thamūd, the ʿĀd, Pharaoh, Sodom and Gomorrah and feel engulfed by their terrible effects. The scene of the great floods and the few human survivors carried in the Ark is painted in two short verses. Read, if you will, how the ʿĀd suffered their terrible fate: "*The ʿĀd were destroyed by a furiously howling wind, which He caused to rage upon them for seven nights and eight decisive days. You could see their people lying dead, like uprooted trunks of hollow palm trees. Can you see any trace of them now?*" (Verses 6–8) Can you fail to see in your mind's eye how this raging storm continued to vent its furious havoc for eight days and seven nights leaving the ʿĀd utterly destroyed and resembling hollow, uprooted tree trunks? It is such a vivid scene that we cannot help but see it with our eyes and paint it with our minds. The same applies to all images of the terrible fates suffered by unbelievers of old.

Then again the images of the terrible end of the universe are brought before us; we hear the noise accompanying them and we are filled with terror and distress. Listen to this verse: "*The earth and mountains are lifted up and with one mighty crash are flattened.*" (Verse 14) Do you not hear that mighty crash after having seen the lifting up and then the fall? Listen again: "*The sky will be rent asunder, for, it will have become frail on that day.*" (Verse 16) Does this sad end, with a beautiful sky torn apart, present itself clearly before you? Keep listening: "*The angels will stand on all its sides and, on that day, eight of them will bear aloft the Throne of your Lord. On that day you shall be brought to judgement and none of your secrets will remain hidden.*" (Verses 17–18) The majesty of this awesome scene can only but fill your imagination.

Then look at the image of the person receiving his record in his right hand. The whole world is too small for his joy. He cheerfully calls on all creatures to come and read his record: "*Come you all! Read this my record.*

I certainly knew that one day I would have to face my account." (Verses 19–20) Contrast this with the image of the one whose record is given to him in his left hand: his words, tone and expression reflect his heart-felt grief: "*Would that I had never been shown my record and knew nothing of my account! Would that death had been the end of me! Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power.*" (Verses 25–29)

Who of us will fail to shudder when we listen to the judgement in the case of the latter person: "*Lay hold of him and shackle him, and burn him in the fire of hell, and then fasten him in a chain seventy cubits long.*" (Verses 30–32) We almost see those receiving the command rushing to carry it out, and we visualize his situation there as we read: "*So, no friend has he here today, nor any food except the filth that none other than the sinners eat.*" (Verses 35–37) Finally, who of us will not experience fear when our minds receive this stern warning: "*Had he attributed some fabrications to Us, We would indeed have seized him by the right hand and cut off his life-vein, and none of you could have saved him.*" (Verses 44–47) Combined, all these images and scenes are so powerful, clear and effective as to require our pressing attention.

The *sūrah*'s verse endings and their variation contribute to its clearly profound effect. At the very beginning, we have a very long '*a*' followed by a doubled plosive '*q*' sound and a fricative '*h*'. Then we have a long stretch in which all the verses end with a clear '*yah*' final syllable. This passage takes us through the scenes of ruin in this world and in the life to come, as well as those of joy and lamentation when personal records are given. Then the ending changes to '*ooh*' when the judgement is pronounced. When the basis of the judgement is outlined in all seriousness, the ending again changes to give us a firm and final sound formed of a long '*e*' followed by either '*m*' or '*n*'. This change of the last consonant and the vowel preceding it, as well as the beat, is a clear phenomenon that parallels the change of scene, image and aura. It fits perfectly with the subject matter and the images drawn. It contributes to the powerful effect the *sūrah* has generally. Having said all this, I would like to conclude by saying that the *sūrah* itself is far more powerful than can be shown by any analysis or comment anyone can make.

Al-Ḥāqqah
(The Inevitable Truth)

سورة الحاقة

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Inevitable Truth! (1)

الْحَاقَّةُ ﴿١﴾

What is the Inevitable Truth? (2)

مَا الْحَاقَّةُ ﴿٢﴾

Would that you knew what the Inevitable Truth is! (3)

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحَاقَّةُ ﴿٣﴾

The people of Thamūd and ʿĀd denied the Striker. (4)

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ وَعَادٌ بِالْقَارِعَةِ ﴿٤﴾

The Thamūd were destroyed by an overwhelming event, (5)

فَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَأُهْلِكُوا بِالطَّاغِيَةِ ﴿٥﴾

while the ʿĀd were destroyed by a furiously howling wind, (6)

وَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَأُهْلِكُوا بِرِيحٍ صَرْصَرٍ عَاتِيَةٍ ﴿٦﴾

which He caused to rage upon them for seven nights and eight decisive days. You could see their people lying dead, like uprooted trunks of hollow palm trees. (7)

سَخَّرَهَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَبْعَ لَيَالٍ وَثَمَانِيَةَ أَيَّامٍ حُسُومًا فَتَرَى الْقَوْمَ فِيهَا صَرْعَىٰ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ خَاوِيَةٍ ﴿٧﴾

Can you see any trace of them now? (8)

فَهَلْ تَرَىٰ لَهُم مِّن بَاقِيَةٍ ﴿٨﴾

Pharaoh, too, and those before him, and the ruined cities – all indulged in sin, (9)

وَجَاءَ فِرْعَوْنُ وَمَن قَبْلَهُ وَالْمُؤْتَفِكَاتُ بِالْخَاطِئَةِ ﴿٩﴾

فَعَصَوْا۟ رَسُولَ رَبِّهِمْ فَأَخَذَهُمْ أَخْذَةً رَّابِيَةً ﴿١٠﴾

and disobeyed their Lord's messenger; and so He took them to task with an ever-tightening grip. (10)

إِنَّا لَمَّا طَغَا ٱلْمَآءُ حَمَلْنَٰكُمْ فِى ٱلْجَارِيَةِ ﴿١١﴾

When the waters rose high, We carried you in the floating Ark, (11)

لِنَجْعَلَهَا لَكُمْ تَذْكِرَةً وَتَعِيَهَآ أُذُنٌ وَٰعِيَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾

making it all a lasting reminder for you, so that attentive ears may take heed. (12)

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِى ٱلصُّورِ نَفْخَةٌ وَٰحِدَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾

When the trumpet is sounded a single time, (13)

وَحُمِلَتِ ٱلْأَرْضُ وَٱلْجِبَالُ فَدُكَّتَا دَكَّةً وَٰحِدَةً ﴿١٤﴾

and the earth and mountains are lifted up and with one mighty crash are flattened, (14)

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ وَقَعَتِ ٱلْوَاقِعَةُ ﴿١٥﴾

that which is certain to happen will on that day have come to pass. (15)

وَٱنشَقَّتِ ٱلسَّمَآءُ فَهِىَ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاهِيَةٌ ﴿١٦﴾

The sky will be rent asunder, for, it will have become frail on that day. (16)

وَٱلْمَلَكُ عَلَىٰٓ أَرْجَآئِهَا ۚ وَيَحْمِلُ عَرْشَ رَبِّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ ثَمَٰنِيَةٌ ﴿١٧﴾

The angels will stand on all its sides and, on that day, eight of them will bear aloft the Throne of your Lord. (17)

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُعْرَضُونَ لَا تَخْفَىٰ مِنكُمْ خَافِيَةٌ ﴿١٨﴾

On that day you shall be brought to judgement and none of your secrets will remain hidden. (18)

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَٰبَهُۥ بِيَمِينِهِۦ فَيَقُولُ هَآؤُمُ ٱقْرَءُوا۟ كِتَٰبِيَهْ ﴿١٩﴾

He who is given his record in his right hand will say, 'Come you all! Read this my record. (19)

إِنِّى ظَنَنتُ أَنِّى مُلَٰقٍ حِسَابِيَهْ ﴿٢٠﴾

I certainly knew that one day I would have to face my account.' (20)

فَهُوَ فِى عِيشَةٍ رَّاضِيَةٍ ﴿٢١﴾

He will be in a happy state of life, (21)

فِى جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

in a lofty garden, (22)

قُطُوفُهَا دَانِيَةٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

with its fruits within easy reach. (23)

كُلُوا۟ وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ هَنِيٓـًٔۢا بِمَآ أَسْلَفْتُمْ فِى ٱلْأَيَّامِ ٱلْخَالِيَةِ ﴿٢٤﴾

'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by.' (24)

وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَٰبَهُۥ بِشِمَالِهِۦ فَيَقُولُ يَٰلَيْتَنِى لَمْ أُوتَ كِتَٰبِيَهْ ﴿٢٥﴾

But he who is given his record in his left hand will say, 'Would that I had never been shown my record (25)

وَلَمْ أَدْرِ مَا حِسَابِيَهْ ﴿٢٦﴾

and knew nothing of my account! (26)

يَٰلَيْتَهَا كَانَتِ ٱلْقَاضِيَةَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Would that death had been the end of me! (27)

مَآ أَغْنَىٰ عَنِّى مَالِيَهْ ﴿٢٨﴾

Nothing has my wealth availed me. (28)

I am now bereft of all my power.' (29)

هَلَكَ عَنِّي سُلْطَانِيَهْ ﴿٢٩﴾

'Lay hold of him and shackle him, (30)

خُذُوهُ فَغُلُّوهُ ﴿٣٠﴾

and burn him in the fire of hell, (31)

ثُمَّ الْجَحِيمَ صَلُّوهُ ﴿٣١﴾

and then fasten him in a chain seventy cubits long.' (32)

ثُمَّ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ ذَرْعُهَا سَبْعُونَ ذِرَاعًا فَاسْلُكُوهُ ﴿٣٢﴾

He did not believe in God Almighty, (33)

إِنَّهُ كَانَ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٣٣﴾

and he never encouraged feeding the needy. (34)

وَلَا يَحُضُّ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ ﴿٣٤﴾

So, no friend has he here today, (35)

فَلَيْسَ لَهُ الْيَوْمَ هَاهُنَا حَمِيمٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

nor any food except the filth (36)

وَلَا طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ غِسْلِينٍ ﴿٣٦﴾

that none other than the sinners eat. (37)

لَّا يَأْكُلُهُ إِلَّا الْخَاطِئُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

I need not swear by what you can see (38)

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِمَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

and what you cannot see: (39)

وَمَا لَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

this [Qur'ān] is the word of a noble Messenger, (40)

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَاعِرٍ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

not the word of a poet – how little you believe! (41)

وَلَا بِقَوْلِ كَاهِنٍ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Nor the word of a soothsayer – how little you reflect! (42)

تَنزِيلٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

This [Qur'ān] is a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds. (43)

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ ﴿٤٤﴾

Had he attributed some fabrications to Us, (44)

لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ﴿٤٥﴾

We would indeed have seized him by the right hand (45)

ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

and cut off his life-vein, (46)

فَمَا مِنكُم مِّنْ أَحَدٍ عَنْهُ حَاجِزِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

and none of you could have saved him. (47)

وَإِنَّهُ لَتَذْكِرَةٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

This [Qur'ān] is indeed a reminder to the God-fearing. (48)

وَإِنَّا لَنَعْلَمُ أَنَّ مِنكُم مُّكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

We well know that among you are some who deny its truth. (49)

وَإِنَّهُ لَحَسْرَةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Yet it will be a cause of bitter regret for the unbelievers. (50)

وَإِنَّهُ لَحَقُّ الْيَقِينِ ﴿٥١﴾

It is indeed truth absolute. (51)

فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٥٢﴾

Extol, then, the glory of the name of your Lord, the Supreme. (52)

True and Inevitable

> *The Inevitable Truth! What is the Inevitable Truth? Would that you knew what the Inevitable Truth is!* (Verses 1–3)

Most of this *sūrah* is taken up with scenes, images and events of the resurrection. Indeed, the *sūrah*'s very title *al-Ḥāqqah*, or the Inevitable Truth resounds with the same. It is a name chosen for both its meaning and the sounds it delivers. *Al-Ḥāqqah* is something that falls due and then takes place, or it becomes inevitable and puts forward its judgement, or it manifests the truth. All these meanings are clear and decisive, fitting with the subject matter and drift of the *sūrah*. As we have already stated, the name chosen provides a powerful beat, one that is in harmony with the *sūrah*'s meaning and which contributes to the intended atmosphere. It prepares us for what is about to befall the unbelievers in this world and in the life to come.

The ambience throughout the *sūrah* is one of seriousness, firmness, awe and fear. In addition to what we have said in the Prologue, it imparts to us a feeling of God's absolute power on the one hand and man's powerlessness on the other. It mentions how God's power can firmly take man to task, in this world and in the next, should he deviate from the code of living God wants man to implement. It is the code God's messengers outlined for people. This code is not laid down so that it can be ignored or abandoned; it is there to be respected and put into practice. Otherwise, God's painful punishment may be meted out at any time.

The words used here, their very sound, meaning and construction contribute to this ambience. The *sūrah* starts with one Arabic word, *al-Ḥāqqah*, translated here as 'the Inevitable Truth'. It is mentioned on its own as a subject that has no predicate. This is followed by a question that emphasizes the fact that the event referred to is extremely grave. This question is followed by the spreading of an air of mystery, so as to take the subject matter out of the area of man's knowledge, "*Would that you knew what the Inevitable Truth is!*" (Verse 3) The *sūrah*, however, does not answer the question. Instead, it leaves us stirring at this awesome event about which we know nothing. Indeed, we cannot know anything about it because it is beyond our knowledge.

Unbelievers' Fates

The *sūrah* begins with an account of the terrible fates met by different communities of unbelievers. They were all dealt with in a decisive and swift manner because the issue in question is very serious and does not allow denial. Those who persist with such denial cannot escape punishment:

> *The people of Thamūd and 'Ād denied the Striker. The Thamūd were destroyed by an overwhelming event, while the 'Ād were destroyed by a furiously howling wind, which He caused to rage upon them for seven nights and eight decisive days. You could see their people lying dead, like uprooted trunks of hollow palm trees. Can you see any trace of them now?* (Verses 4–8)

Al-Qāri'ah, or The Striker, is another name for Resurrection Day, complementing as it does *al-Ḥāqqah*, the Inevitable Truth. This means that in addition to its being true and inevitable, it also strikes like two solid objects hammering against each other. The Striker inflicts hearts with terror and delivers a crushing blow upon the universe. By its very sound, it strikes loudly, crushing everything and everyone around. Both the Thamūd and the 'Ād denied it, saying that it was untrue. Let us see then what the result of such denial was:

"*The Thamūd were destroyed by an overwhelming event.*" (Verse 5) As mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'ān, the people of Thamūd used to live in the area of al-Ḥijr to the north of Ḥijāz, close to today's Palestine. They were destroyed by an event named elsewhere as a '*stunning blast*'. Here, the *sūrah* does not mention this blast but rather describes it as an '*overwhelming event*', as this fits better with the atmosphere of catastrophe that characterizes the *sūrah*. Moreover, the note the Arabic word *ṭāghiyah* strikes is consistent with the verse endings in the present passage. This short single verse is enough to completely engulf the Thamūd, leaving no trace of them.

The Thamūd's fate was swift and sudden, a single blast overwhelming them all. By contrast, the *sūrah* gives us a detailed account of the 'Ād's fate, which was accomplished over seven nights and eight decisive days.

The 'Ād were destroyed by a howling, extremely cold wind described here as *ṣarṣar*. Whilst this carries strong connotations of such '*howling*', this is still not enough. Its howling is clearly described as furious, and fits with the fact that the 'Ād were arrogant and tyrannical in their dealings with others. They used to live at al-Aḥqāf in southern Arabia, in the area between Yemen and Ḥadramawt. This howling wind, furious as it was, "*He caused to rage upon them for seven nights and eight decisive days.*" (Verse 7) The *sūrah* gives the exact duration of this hurricane that hit for so long so as to draw an image of the scene after it was all over: "*You could see their people lying dead, like uprooted trunks of hollow palm trees.*" (Verse 7) The image is detailed, pressed on our minds so that we can see its every detail. The people of the 'Ād are '*lying dead*' everywhere, and they look '*like uprooted tree trunks*', but these trunks are '*hollow*', eaten from inside and no longer able to stand upright. They are thrown on the ground, lifeless. The sad silence of death now reigns after the furiously howling hurricane. So, what is left of them? The answer is expressed in a question for which no one bothers to hear an answer: "*Can you see any trace of them now?*" (Verse 8)

Such was the fates of the 'Ād and Thamūd. Other communities that denied the divine faith also suffered similar fates. In two short verses, the *sūrah* sums up several of these:

> *Pharaoh, too, and those before him, and the ruined cities – all indulged in sin, and disobeyed their Lord's messenger; and so He took them to task with an ever-tightening grip.* (Verses 9–10)

Pharaoh, in Egypt, was the one who opposed the Prophet Moses, but the *sūrah* gives no details of '*those before him*'. The '*ruined cities*' were those of Sodom and Gomorrah. The *sūrah* sums up the deeds of all these communities in a short phrase saying that they '*all indulged in sin*'. It explains that they all '*disobeyed their Lord's messenger.*' The fact is that these communities had several messengers whom they disobeyed, yet these messengers advocated the same truth, and their messages were essentially the same. Hence, they are like one messenger, representing a single truth. This is one of the most inspiring touches of the Qur'ānic style. Again the *sūrah* sums up their fates in a way that combines

swiftness with strong and decisive action: "*He took them to task with an ever-tightening grip.*" (Verse 10)

The *sūrah* then gives us an image of the great floods and the floating Ark on the surface, in reference to the fate suffered by the people of Noah when they rejected God's message. Here the *sūrah* reminds people of God's favour as He saved their forefathers. Yet they do not take heed or give thanks:

> *When the waters rose high, We carried you in the floating Ark, making it all a lasting reminder for you, so that attentive ears may take heed.* (Verses 11–12)

The images of the floods and the floating Ark fit well with the other scenes portrayed in the *sūrah*, and share the same verse endings so as to rhyme with other verses describing these fates. The fact is that the *sūrah* gives all this as "*a lasting reminder for you, so that attentive ears may take heed.*" This should inspire the hearts and ears of people who continue to deny the truth after all that happened before them and the warnings that were given to earlier communities. Indeed signs and lessons, as well as favours and blessings, have been given in abundance, but people need to wake up and take heed.

Greater Horrors

All such devastation and catastrophe seems, however, to be exceedingly small when compared to the horrors of the Striker, the Inevitable Truth, which those unbelievers deny, even though they have seen what befell earlier communities that denied it. These fates, terrible catastrophes in their own right, are of a limited nature compared to the absolute calamity that the Striker brings about on the day to be witnessed by all. Having thus introduced this horror in general terms, the *sūrah* now portrays its details:

> *When the trumpet is sounded a single time, and the earth and mountains are lifted up and with one mighty crash are flattened, that which is certain to happen will on that day have come to pass. The*

sky will be rent asunder, for, it will have become frail on that day. The angels will stand on all its sides and, on that day, eight of them will bear aloft the Throne of your Lord. (Verses 13–17)

We believe that there will be a single sounding of the trumpet and that this will be followed by these events. We do not know any details, however, because these events belong to a world about which we have no information except these texts. We have no other source to refer to. Moreover, no further details can add to the significance of these statements. To try to learn such details is a useless exercise which we are instructed not to resort to. When the trumpet is sounded once, a huge movement will take place: "*the earth and mountains are lifted up and with one mighty crash are flattened.*" (Verse 14) The image of the earth and the mountains being lifted high and thrown so that they are crushed and levelled is absolutely terrifying. We walk over the earth in peace and reassurance, feeling that it is firm in its position. We look at the mountains and feel how stable and firmly placed they are. Yet both are lifted and sent crashing, as if they were a ball in a child's hand. How small man must feel, and how small is his world, compared with such great power.

What happens when all this takes place? It is the very thing the *sūrah* is speaking about: "*that which is certain to happen will on that day have come to pass.*" (Verse 15) What is certain is the Day of Resurrection, which is called by many names such as *al-Ḥāqqah*, or the Inevitable Truth, *al-Qāri'ah*, or the Striker, *al-Wāqi'ah*, or the Happening, as if the certainty of its happening is part of its very nature. Using this last name here is deliberate, intended to give a particular impression countering all doubt and denial. Yet this is not all. The skies will also be seriously affected: "*The sky will be rent asunder, for, it will have become frail on that day.*" (Verse 16) We do not know for certain to what the term '*the sky*' refers to here, but this statement and similar ones referring to celestial events on that great day speak of a collapse of the order that keeps the universe functioning according to an accurate and fascinating plan. Once this perfect order collapses, all its different parts will be in chaos.

It is mere coincidence that astronomers are now predicting that something of this nature will take place bringing about an end to the

world. Their predictions are based on scientific observations and the little they have come to know of the nature of the universe. We, for our part, almost witness these scenes as they unfold before us through the Qur'ānic texts informing us of things that are absolutely certain because they come from God, the Creator who knows what He has created. We almost see the earth being lifted high, with its mountains that are massive by our measure, but infinitely small when compared to the universe. We see them all sent crashing, being levelled. We see the sky torn apart, frail, while the planets are scattered everywhere. We see all this through the Qur'ān as it draws its images and plants them before our eyes.

An air of majesty then spreads over the entire stage. All the sounds of the trumpet, the crashing, the rending asunder and the scattering of stars then dies down, and we have an image of the Almighty's Throne: "*The angels will stand on all its sides and, on that day, eight of them will bear aloft the Throne of your Lord.*" (Verse 17) The angels are on all sides of the sky that has been torn and rent asunder, and the throne is there above them carried by eight of their number. Are they eight angels, or eight rows of angels, or eight classes, or some other eight known only to God? We do not know who or what they are, just as we do not know what the throne is like, or how it is carried. Knowledge of all these details has not been imparted to us, and God wants us to know of them only what He tells us. Therefore, we leave aside all details of these unknown matters and concentrate instead on the majestic aura they impart to the whole scene. This is what we are meant to feel as the events of that awesome day are reported.

> *On that day you shall be brought to judgement and none of your secrets will remain hidden.* (Verse 18)

All are exposed: bodies, souls, consciences, actions and destinies. All curtains that used to hide secrets are lifted, and souls are laid bare just like bodies. What used to be concealed is now in full view. Man is without any of his precautions, schemings and plannings. What he was keen to conceal, even from himself, is there to be seen by all. Such disgrace and in front of everyone! As for God, He has always been fully

aware of every little thing, even that which is most deeply hidden, but man, accustomed to all sorts of concealment on earth, does not fully appreciate this. Now, on the Day of Judgement, when everything is laid bare throughout the universe, he realizes this. The earth is flattened and has no corner or protrusion to conceal anything; the sky is rent asunder showing what once was behind it; all bodies are without cover, and souls are left bare concealing no secret. The situation is very difficult indeed; harder to accept than the flattening of the earth and the mountains or the tearing of the sky apart. It leaves man bare in body, soul, history, and action. Not just this but he is also exposed in front of all these huge numbers of creatures – humans, *jinn* and angels – in front of the Almighty and under His majestic throne.

Man has a very complex nature. There are within his soul many corners and pathways where he hides his feelings, whims, yearnings, thoughts, secrets and private matters. Imagine how a snail quickly withdraws into its shell when it feels danger, hiding itself completely. Should man realize that an eye manages to see what he is keen to conceal, or that a glance exposes something he wants to remain hidden, he does much more than a snail sensing danger. He is deeply hurt when someone looks into his inner secrets. So how will man feel when he stands truly naked in body, heart, feeling and soul; when he has nothing to cover himself with, when he is under the throne of the Almighty and before this great assembly of creatures? This is the most painful of all situations.

Overwhelmed with Joy

The *sūrah* now presents two images, one of the winners and one of the losers. This is again done as though it is happening at this very instant:

> *He who is given his record in his right hand will say, 'Come you all! Read this my record. I certainly knew that one day I would have to face my account.' He will be in a happy state of life, in a lofty garden, with its fruits within easy reach. 'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by.'* (Verses 19–24)

Taking one's record with one's right or left hand, or behind one's back may be a statement expressing a material fact, or it may be an idiomatic expression, following standard rules of Arabic as it refers to the good direction as the right and the evil one as the left or the back. Whichever may be the case, the meaning remains the same. It merits no argument as any such argument spoils the effect of what takes place on this awesome day. What we see here is a person who is given his record and realizes that he has won. The hardship of the day is gone, and he moves along, overjoyed, among the great multitude. His happiness overflows and he calls to all people, saying: "*Come you all! Read this my record.*" (Verse 19) In his overwhelming delight, he says that he never thought that he would be spared. He expected to have to account for his deeds, and that means suffering. As one *ḥadīth* states, 'Ā'ishah quotes the Prophet as saying: "Whoever is held to account will be tormented." She then asked the Prophet: "How come, when God says: '*He who is given his record in his right hand will in time have a lenient reckoning and return rejoicing to his people.*'" (84: 7–9) He said: "This merely speaks of presentation. Whoever is questioned about his deeds on the Day of Judgement will indeed be in ruin." [Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.]

Another report on the authority of Abū 'Uthmān states: "A believer is given his record in his right hand where God gives him shelter. He reads first his bad deeds. Every time he reads such a negative item, his colour changes, then he begins to read his good deeds and his face regains its colour. He looks around and finds that his bad deeds have been replaced by good ones. It is at this point that such a person calls out to all people to come and read his record."

It is reported on the authority of 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥanẓalah, a Companion of the Prophet who was a martyr in the Battle of Uḥud: "God stops His servant on the Day of Judgement and shows him his evil deeds written on the back of his record. He asks him: 'Have you done this?' He confirms that he did. God says to him: 'I did not make it public during your life, and today I am forgiving you these.' He is then given his record of good deeds in his right hand. As for the unbelievers and the hypocrites, it is concerning these that "*witnesses shall say: 'These are they who lied against their Lord.' God's curse is on the wrongdoers.*"

(11: 18) The details of blessings made ready for such people are then announced before all. The account given here of these blessings includes some aspects of material comfort. This suited the state of those addressed by the Qur'ān at the time. They were still newcomers to Islam; it had not yet given its distinctive hue to their feelings, nor had they had the chance to appreciate luxuries higher than any material comfort: "*He will be in a happy state of life, in a lofty garden, with its fruits within easy reach. 'Eat and drink to your heart's ontent as a reward for what you have done in days gone by.'*" (Verses 21–24)

Such blessings and comforts are coupled with a special honour that is felt in the fact that the *sūrah* makes its address directly to those deserving of it, saying to them to eat and drink as they please. This type of blessing is the one those who were the first to be addressed by the Qur'ān could appreciate in the early stages of their new bond with God. Their feelings had not yet attained the sublime level that finds in being close to God what is much higher than any material comfort or luxury. Yet this type can satisfy the needs of many people across many generations.

At the Opposite End

> *But he who is given his record in his left hand will say, 'Would that I had never been shown my record and knew nothing of my account! Would that death had been the end of me! Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power.' 'Lay hold of him and shackle him, and burn him in the fire of hell, and then fasten him in a chain seventy cubits long.' He did not believe in God Almighty, and he never encouraged feeding the needy. So, no friend has he here today, nor any food except the filth that none other than the sinners eat.* (Verses 25–37)

"*But he who is given his record in his left hand,*" and knows that his bad deeds are reckoned against him realizes that his fate is one of suffering. He stands among this great multitude full of sorrow, broken. He will say: "*Would that I had never been shown my record and knew nothing of my account! Would that death had been the end of me! Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power.*" (Verses 25–29)

Long is his lamentation, miserable his tone and desperate his words. The *sūrah* presents his reaction at length and the listener almost feels his endless lamentation. This is another aspect of the Qur'ānic style: some situations are described at length while others are given a quick and short presentation, depending on the effect the Qur'ān wants to impart. In this case, the *sūrah* wants to bring this image of lamentation alive before us, so that we feel it thoroughly. Therefore, it harps long on its details. We see this miserable person wishing he had never witnessed this gathering, never been given his record, and knowing nothing of his account. He would have loved for the Striker to have spelt his absolute end, removing him from all existence. He bemoans that nothing of what he used to rate highly or treasure appears to be of any use or value: "*Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power.*" (Verses 28–29) The ending of these very short verses, with a strongly aspirated '*h*' preceded by a '*ya*' sound that comes after a long '*a*', adds to the tone of sorrow and grief. It is all part of the very clear ambience the *sūrah* generates.

This long, sorrowful lamentation is only interrupted by a decisive order given from on high:

> *Lay hold of him and shackle him, and burn him in the fire of hell, and then fasten him in a chain seventy cubits long.* (Verses 30–32)

A command is given by God Almighty, and everyone in the universe moves against this miserable creature. Those to whom the command is issued will move swiftly from all corners. A *ḥadīth* related by Ibn Abī Ḥātim states: "When God says, '*lay hold of him,*' seventy thousand angels swiftly take him. Each one of these angels can, in one gesture, cast seventy thousand creatures into hell."

"*And shackle him.*" The first angel to so hold him will immediately put the shackles around him. "*And burn him in the fire of hell.*" (Verse 31) We almost hear the sound of the fire as it burns such people. "*And then fasten him in a chain seventy cubits long.*" (Verse 32) One cubit of this chain is enough, but the impression intended here is one of elongation and the mention of '*seventy cubits*' gives us this sense of perpetuity.

Now that the command has been given, its justification is announced for all to know:

He did not believe in God Almighty, and he never encouraged feeding the needy. (Verses 33–34)

This is a person whose heart is devoid of faith and compassion. Thus, the only place fit for him is the fire. With a heart that has no trace of faith, he is ruined, like a barren land engulfed in darkness. He is below the level of animals, and indeed below the level of inanimate objects. Everything in the universe believes in God and glorifies Him, and as such they maintain their bond with their source of existence. This person, on the other hand, severed his ties with God, and therefore has no tie with the universe.

Likewise, his heart is devoid of compassion. A needy person is one who desperately needs compassion, but this one does not feel for his fellow humans in need. He does not encourage feeding them, which is a step further than simply providing the needy with food. It is a step that suggests a social duty that requires believers to encourage one another to undertake. It is closely related to faith, mentioned here after faith and given its value in God's measure:

So, no friend has he here today, nor any food except the filth that none other than the sinners eat. (Verses 35–37)

This complements the announcement from on high concerning the fate of such a miserable person. Since he had no faith in God and did not encourage the feeding of the needy, he has no friends, and he is deprived of all favours. His food is the filth that pours out of the people of hell. Such is the food that serves well those hardened hearts that are devoid of all compassion. It is a type of food that "*none other than the sinners eat.*" (Verse 37) He is essentially one of the sinners.

Such are the characteristics of the person that deserves the divine punishment of being cast into hell, tied with a chain seventy cubits long. This is the worst punishment meted out in hell. What will happen, then, to those who actually prevent giving food to the needy and who make women, children and the elderly people starve, hitting hard at those who give them something to eat or a piece of clothing to wear in

the cold winter months? Such people do exist from time to time.[1] So how will God requite them?

Perhaps this terrifying scene was drawn because the Arabian environment was hard and cruel. It needed to have such shocking images to awaken its better feelings. Such environments do occur throughout history. Furthermore, these may exist side by side with softer and more responsive ones. The earth is wide, and on it a great variety of people, depicting a similarly great variety of psychologies, exist. The Qur'ān addresses every level and every soul in a way that finds its effect. Today, the population of the earth includes some very hardened, cruel hearts. These can only be influenced when addressed with words of fire, such as the ones used in this *sūrah*.

The Qur'ānic Revelations

The *sūrah* now makes a categorical statement defining the nature of the Qur'ān recited by God's noble Messenger, but received by the Arabs with derision and ridicule:

> *I need not swear by what you can see and what you cannot see: this [Qur'ān] is the word of a noble Messenger, not the word of a poet – how little you believe! Nor the word of a soothsayer – how little you reflect! This [Qur'ān] is a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds.* (Verses 38–43)

The statement is very clear, definite and certain. Hence, it requires no oath to prove it or to confirm its source. It comes from the truth. It requires no further confirmation. "*I need not swear by what you can see and what you cannot see.*" (Verses 38–39) This is an expression that imparts a sense of greatness to both the visible world and the world beyond. Needless to say, the universe is far greater than what people can say, and indeed what they can imagine. Indeed, all that humans

1. During Nasser's reign in Egypt, anyone who donated something to alleviate the plight of families of imprisoned members of the Muslim Brotherhood was liable to five years imprisonment. – Editor's note.

can see and imagine is what they need to fulfil their role of building the earth, as God has willed placing them in charge of it. Within the great universe, their planet, the earth, is no more than a barely visible particle. Humans cannot go beyond what they are allowed to see and comprehend of this vast universe, its laws and secrets.

"*I need not swear by what you can see and what you cannot see.*" Such a statement tells us that beyond the reach of our faculties of perception there are worlds and secrets of which we know nothing. It thus broadens our vision of the universe and the truth. The universe is not confined to what we can see or comprehend with our limited faculties. After all, our task on earth is to build human life on it, and we have only been given what we need to fulfil this task. Yet when we appreciate this truth of our limited ability, and that there is a greater world beyond what we see, we can elevate ourselves above our needs and reach out to that source of perfect knowledge.

Those who confine themselves within what their senses can reach, using only their available tools, are wretched. They are imprisoned within a world that remains narrow despite its vastness. It is especially narrow when compared to the great universe. During different periods of history, some people, few or great in number, have been willing to imprison themselves, by their own hands, within the limits of their senses and what they see in the present world. They closed the windows of true light and knowledge that come from being in touch with the essential truth through faith. Some have gone even further and have sought to close these windows to all people. They did so in the name of *jāhiliyyah* at one time, and in the name of secularism at another. Both are types of imprisonment that bring endless misery, because they both involve isolation from the great sources of light and knowledge.

During the present century,[2] science has begun to rid itself of the fetters with which it shackled itself over the previous two centuries. It has started, through its own experiments, to regain its light. It had previously been on the loose, aiming to break from the confinement imposed on it by the Church. Now it knows its limits; it knows that its limited tools lead to what is beyond limit in this great universe. Now we

2. The author is referring here to the twentieth century. ~ Editor's note.

see a new call to faith made by scientists who have found their humility. All this appears to herald a new era of open-mindedness to end that of confinement in the narrow cell of materialism.

Alexis Carrel, a French surgeon and biologist who pioneered research in different areas and was the Nobel Prize winner for medicine in 1912, said: "This vast universe is full of active minds other than ours. If the human mind depends solely on its own guidance, it will be lost in the maze that surrounds it. Prayer is one method of communication with the minds around us and with the eternal mind that controls the destinies of all worlds, whether these are apparent to us or concealed from us."

"A feeling of holiness, together with other spiritual activities, have a special role in life because these bring us in contact with the spiritual world and its great mystery."[3]

Another French scientist who contributed to research in anatomy and physics, and who worked with the Curies, wrote:

> Many intelligent and good intentioned people think that they cannot believe in God because they cannot imagine His nature. Yet an honest person who has the scientific drive does not need to imagine God's nature any more than a physicist needs to understand the nature of electricity. In both cases, our imagination remains deficient and invalid. It is impossible to imagine electricity in material terms, yet its effects are more concrete than a piece of wood.[4]

Sir Arthur Thomson, a famous Scottish naturalist and biologist, wrote: "We live at a time when the hard earth crust is becoming transparent, and the atmosphere is losing its material structure. Hence, our time is least suited to taking a too materialistic view." He also wrote:

> A religious mind should not be sorry that a physicist does not move on from the study of nature to the Creator of nature, because this

3. This quotation is taken from an Arabic translation quoted by Al-'Aqqād, A.M., *'Aqā'id al-Mufakkirın fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*. Unfortunately, Sayyid Quṭb does not give further details of the title.

4. Ibid.

> is not the line a physicist follows. The conclusion may be much bigger than the premise if scientists would draw on their study of physics to make conclusions on metaphysics. We should, however, be glad because physicists have enabled the religious tendency to breathe in a scientific environment. This was most difficult in our parents' and grandparents' time... If physicists have no business discussing God, as mistakenly advocated by Mr Langdon Davies in his book on man and his world, we say that the best service science has done is to lead man to formulate a more noble and sublime concept of God. We say literally that science has given man a new sky and a new earth, motivating him to exert his maximum mental effort. As a result, man often finds that he can only be at peace when he moves beyond the realm of understanding into the realm of certainty and reliance on God.[5]

A. Cressy Morrison, a former Head of the New York Academy of Sciences, wrote:

> We do approach the vast abyss of the unknowable when we realize that all matter has scientifically become one by the acceptance of the theory that it is but a manifestation of a universal unit essentially electrical. But certainly chance has little place in the formation of the cosmos, for the mighty universe is governed by law.
>
> The rise of man the animal to a self-conscious reasoning being is too great a step to be taken by the process of material evolution or without creative purpose.
>
> If the reality of purpose is accepted, man as such may be a mechanism. But what operates this mechanism? For without operation it is useless. Science does not account for the operator, nor does Science say that it is material.
>
> Progress has now been sufficient for us to see that God seems to be giving man a spark of His own intelligence.[6]

5. Ibid.
6. Morrison, A. Cressy (1962), *Man Does Not Stand Alone*, Kingswood, Surrey: The World's Work (1913) Ltd., pp. 113–114.

Thus, using its own tools, science has started to break through the prison walls of materialism to breathe the fresh air to which the Qur'ān refers in statements like, "*I need not swear by what you can see and what you cannot see.*" (Verses 38–39) Yet in our own midst there are some who continue to try to close the windows with both their hands, to prevent the light from coming through, preferring to live in darkness. They do so in the name of science, without realizing that intellectually they lag behind science, and spiritually they lag behind religion. Moreover, they are backward, unable to move freely in pursuit of the truth. All this backwardness puts them in a position unworthy of man, the creature God has honoured.

God says that there is no need for an oath to prove the truth that "*this* [*Qur'ān*] *is the word of a noble Messenger, not the word of a poet – how little you believe! nor the word of a soothsayer – how little you reflect! This* [*Qur'ān*] *is a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds.*" (Verses 40–43) One of the false allegations the unbelievers in Makkah fabricated against the Qur'ān and the Prophet alleged that Muḥammad was a poet or soothsayer. They based this on their recognition that the Qur'ān was superior to anything human beings could say or compose. They used to imagine that every poet had a friend from among the *jinn* who brought him his fine poetry, and that a soothsayer similarly had contacts with the *jinn*, giving him knowledge and information unavailable to humans. Yet a quick glance at the nature of the Qur'ān, and the nature of poetry and soothsaying is sufficient to show how hollow such claims are.

Poetry has its musical beat and it may be full of fine and beautiful images, but it can never be confused with the Qur'ān. There is a fundamental difference between the two. The Qur'ān establishes a complete concept of life based on truth, a holistic approach and clear notions of God's existence, the universe and life. Poetry, on the other hand, is an expression of a series of charged reactions that rarely reflects a consistent vision of life and this in situations of pleasure and anger, freedom and restriction, love and hate, as well as other changing influences.

Furthermore, this consistent concept the Qur'ān lays down is initiated in whole and in part by the Qur'ān itself, and attributed to its divine source. Every aspect of this concept suggests that it is not of man's

making. It is not in the nature of human beings that they should come up with a complete concept of the universe. They have never done so in the past, nor will they ever be able to do so. We have a complete record of what human intelligence has come up with concerning the universe and the power that controls its system. It is all recorded in philosophical and intellectual works, as well as in poetry. When these are set side by side with the Qur'ānic concept, it is clearly apparent that the latter is not the work of a human mind. It is of a unique status, one that distinguishes it from all that the human intellect can produce.

The same applies to soothsaying. Never in human history, up to the present moment, has a soothsayer produced a complete code of living like the one delineated in the Qur'ān. All that soothsayers produce is limited to rhyming sentences containing some aspects of wisdom or ambiguous references.

Moreover, there are some Qur'ānic touches that are beyond man's ability to make. We discussed some of these when we commented on the relevant verses. For example, no one has ever portrayed comprehensive and accurate knowledge in images like those that follow: "*With Him are the keys to what lies beyond the reach of human perception: none knows them but He. He knows all that the land and sea contain; not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything fresh or dry but is recorded in a clear book.*" (6: 59) "*He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it; all that descends from the skies and all that ascends to them. He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do.*" (57: 4) "*No female conceives or gives birth without His knowledge. No one attains to old age or has his life cut short unless it be thus laid down in [God's] decree. All this is easy for God.*" (35: 11)

No human being has ever, before or after the revelation of the Qur'ān, drawn an image of the power that holds the universe and conducts its affairs like this Qur'ānic verse: "*It is God alone who holds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate [from their courses]. If they should ever deviate, no one else could uphold them after Him.*" (35: 41) Nor has anyone ever attempted a description of the emergence of life in the universe and the deliberate balances that ensure its continuity in the universe similar to this Qur'ānic account: "*It is God who splits the grain and the*

fruit-stone. He brings forth the living out of that which is dead and the dead out of that which is alive. Such is God. How, then, are you deluded away from the truth? He is the One who causes the day to break. He has made the night to be [a source of stillness], and the sun and the moon for reckoning. All this is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. It is He that has set up for you the stars, so that you may be guided by them in the deep darkness of land and sea. We have made Our revelations plain indeed to people who have knowledge. He it is who has brought you all into being from a single soul and has given you a dwelling and a place of sojourn. We have made Our revelations plain indeed to people of understanding. And He it is who sends down water from the sky with which We bring forth plants of every type and out of these We bring forth verdure from which We bring forth grain piled tight, packed on one another; and out of the spathe of the palm tree, dates in thick clusters; and gardens of vines; and the olive tree, and the pomegranate: all so alike, and yet so different. Behold their fruit when they come to fruition and ripen. Surely in these there are clear signs for people who truly believe." (6: 95–99)

Such universal touches are found in plenty in the Qur'ān. They have no parallel in the way people tend to express similar thoughts and meanings. This is evidence enough to determine the source of this book, regardless of any other evidence that may be drawn from what the book says or the circumstances of its revelation. Indeed, the whole idea of the Qur'ān being like poetry or soothsaying is flimsy. Even when the Qur'ān was still in its early stages of revelation, having provided only a small number of *sūrahs* and verses with this distinctive divine colour, this idea did not cut any grounds. The elders of the Quraysh used to reflect on it from time to time, rejecting this notion, but they were blinded to the truth because of their own personal interests. It is just like the Qur'ān says: "*Since they refuse to be guided by it, they will always say, 'This is an ancient falsehood.'*" (46: 11)

Authoritative biographical works about the Prophet report several events when the elders of the Quraysh privately rejected this whole idea. Ibn Isḥāq reports a meeting attended by a large number of Makkans and chaired, as it were, by al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, who was one of the more respected Quraysh elders. This was held shortly before the pilgrimage season and the idea was to agree an appropriate strategy:

In his opening address, al-Walīd said: "Now that the pilgrimage season is approaching, people will start arriving from all over the place. They must have heard about your friend [meaning the Prophet]. So you had better agree what to say when you are asked about him. We must guard against having too many opinions, particularly if they are mutually contradictory."

When his audience asked his advice as to what they should say, he preferred to listen to their suggestions first. What concerned al-Walīd most was that the opinion they would come out with should take account of the fact that Muḥammad was asking people to listen to the Qur'ān, God's message, expressed in beautiful language and powerful style. The description they would attach to Muḥammad should also account for his persuasive, eloquent argument.

Descriptions like 'fortune-teller', 'madman', 'poet' and 'magician' were proposed. None was considered convincing by al-Walīd, who pointed out weaknesses in each, one after the other. He told his people that what Muḥammad said was nothing like what was said by such men. When nobody could suggest anything more plausible, they asked al-Walīd if he had a better suggestion.

He said: "What Muḥammad says is certainly beautiful. It is like a date tree with solid roots and rich fruit. Every one of these suggestions you have made is bound to be recognized as false. The least disputable one is to claim that he is a magician who repeats magic words which make a man fall out with his father, mother, wife and clan." They all approved of al-Walīd's suggestion and set about preparing their propaganda campaign to make the pilgrims wary of Muḥammad and unwilling to meet him.[7]

Another prominent Quraysh figure to speak out about the Qur'ān was al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith, when the Quraysh felt at a loss after having failed to win any compromise from the Prophet. He outlined their predicament in the following way:

7. Salahi, Adil (2002), *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, pp. 119–120.

> People of Quraysh, you are confronted with a problem for which you have not been able to find a solution. When Muḥammad was still a young man living among you, he won general admiration because he always spoke the truth and his honesty could not be faulted. When he had grown grey, and started to preach whatever he is preaching to you, you began to allege that he was a sorcerer. By God, he is no sorcerer. We have seen magicians and their tricks in the past. You also accused him of being a fortune teller. By God, he is not one, for we have seen fortune tellers and how they repeat their rhyming phrases. You also claimed that he was a poet. Again I say that, by God, he is not a poet, for we have seen poets and listened to all types of poetry. You claimed that he was also a madman, but he is far from being so. We have seen what madness has done to people, and how it causes them to say incoherent things. I say, people of Quraysh, you have to look at this question very carefully, for you have a big problem on your hands.[8]

The similarity between what the two prominent Quraysh figures state is almost complete. This is not surprising, considering their unresolved dilemma of how to deal with the Qur'ān. We also mentioned in our discussion of the previous *sūrah*, The Pen, how 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah reacted to the Qur'ān, when he tried to make some offers to the Prophet in the hope that he would stop advocating his message. When they alleged that Muḥammad was a sorcerer or a soothsayer, that was nothing but a stratagem, crude at times and cunning at others. It only needed a little reflection to realize that it was all wrong. Hence, there was no need for an oath of any sort to confirm that the Qur'ān was the word of a noble Messenger and a revelation from on high.

The statement that the Qur'ān "*is the word of a noble Messenger*," does not mean that it is of his own composition. It rather means that it is a different type of word, one not uttered by a poet or a soothsayer. It can only be said by a Messenger from God, carrying it from the One who sent him. What confirms this meaning is the word '*Messenger*' being sent with it. He is neither a poet nor a soothsayer composing his own

8. Ibid., pp. 161–162.

words alone or with the assistance of a *jinnee*. This is further confirmed by the categorical statement that follows: "*This [Qur'ān] is a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds.*" (Verse 43)

In its negation of the Qur'ān being the word of a poet or a soothsayer, the *sūrah* uses the following two expressions: "*how little you believe!... how little you reflect!*" Thus, it completely negates their having any faith or resorting to any reflection. In a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet is described as 'little indulging in frivolous talk', which means that he did not say such things at all. Thus, the *sūrah* is describing those unbelievers as devoid of faith and reflection. No believer would say of the Prophet that he was a poet, and no man who reflects would say that he was a soothsayer.

A Very Serious Threat

As the *sūrah* draws to its conclusion, it issues a terrifying threat to anyone who fabricates something about the very serious matter of faith. The threat is issued so as to affirm the only possible scenario of the Prophet being very truthful and honest in delivering the message entrusted to him. The proof is that God has not punished him severely as He would have done so had the Prophet been anything other than that:

> *Had he attributed some fabrications to Us, We would indeed have seized him by the right hand and cut off his life-vein, and none of you could have saved him.* (Verses 44–47)

The import of these verses is confirmation that Muḥammad (peace be upon him) only told them the truth. Had he invented something other than what was revealed to him from on high, God would have killed him in the way the verses describe. Since this did not take place, the inevitable conclusion is that he was truthful.

Yet this confirmation is given in a scene that goes much further than the actual statement, adding some fearsome connotations, action and life. We see here the violent, scary action of someone being seized by the right hand and his life-vein being cut. It makes a clear impression of God's limitless power and mankind's utter weakness in comparison.

It adds a suggestion that this question of faith is so serious that it allows no complacency or leniency towards anyone, not even Muḥammad in his close relation with God. Furthermore, these verses carry a strong beat, spreading an air of fear and submission to God.

The *sūrah* concludes with a statement of the true nature of the Qur'ān:

> *This [Qur'ān] is indeed a reminder to the God-fearing. We well know that among you are some who deny its truth. Yet it will be a cause of bitter regret for the unbelievers. It is indeed truth absolute.* (Verses 48–51)

This Qur'ān reminds God-fearing hearts and they remember. The truth the Qur'ān states is ingrained in people's hearts, but the reminder brings it to the fore in the minds of those who are God-fearing. Others continue to be preoccupied, unaware, and as such they benefit nothing by the reminder that this book, the Qur'ān, provides. It is a fact that the God-fearing find in the Qur'ān life, light, knowledge and remembrance, but none of these is experienced by other people.

"*We well know that among you are some who deny its truth.*" (Verse 49) Yet this is of no consequence, and it alters nothing of the reality. Those who reject the truth are of no importance whatsoever. "*Yet it will be a cause of bitter regret for the unbelievers.*" (Verse 50) It elevates the status of the believers and brings down the unbelievers. It establishes the truth and undermines the falsehood to which the unbelievers cling. Moreover, it provides the argument against them when they face the reckoning on the Day of Judgement. They will lament their fate to which their rejection of the truth of the Qur'ān has led them. Thus, it is a source of bitter regret for all unbelievers in this life and in the life to come.

In the face of all denials and rejection by the unbelievers, the Qur'ān is "*indeed truth absolute.*" (Verse 51) It is not merely the truth, but the truth absolute, reconfirmed in absolute terms. In fact, every word in the Qur'ān is profoundly true; every verse carries enough evidence that it originates with God, who Himself is the Truth.

At this point, an instruction is given from on high to the noble Messenger. It comes at the right time and during the right situation: "*Extol, then, the glory of the name of your Lord, the Supreme.*" (Verse 52)

This is the most suitable action as it reflects acknowledgement of God's glory and man's position as God's servant. To glorify God is the feeling that a believer experiences after the last statement explaining the nature of the Qur'ān is given and after the long discussion of God Almighty's greatness.